RISK MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR OF KAZAKHSTAN: CURRENT STATE AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract. *The system of risk management in the state bodies of Kazakhstan and many other countries is becoming particularly relevant and scientifically problematic, since the implementation of tasks set in national projects and development plans is often carried out under conditions of uncertainty and a diversity of factors, which can make it difficult to accurately identify and quantify risks for management decision-making.*

Based on scientific approaches to risk management in the public sector, this paper attempts to investigate the state of readiness of civil servants in Kazakhstan to implement risk management and determine the range of basic competencies of employees and the level of organizational culture, as differences in the culture and structure of organizations can affect the successful implementation of risk management at the level of public administration.

The analysis of the above-mentioned problem is based on a quantitative method of scientific research – a survey, which allows us to draw conclusions and generalizations about such a large group of respondents as civil servants in Kazakhstan, consisting of around 70,000 employees. Due to the fact that the survey was conducted using an online platform and was confidential in nature, the results of the study are characterized by representativeness and reliability.

Introduction

Risks have become inherent aspects of modern life and are present in all spheres of society. Kazakhstan, like many countries, underestimated the risk of COVID-19 infection, which resulted in high mortality rates among both the general population and healthcare workers (WHO 2022). Hasty isolation and quarantine measures led to a decline in the adaptability and mobility of small and medium-sized businesses, the halting of large-scale production, and an increase in unemployment and poverty among the population (BCG 2020). The consequences of economic and social risks have led to political issues and armed unrest (Bordovskikh 2020).

In order to respond to the rapidly changing socio-economic environment, the government of Kazakhstan has undertaken a series of modernization programs in recent years, focusing on expanding access to services for the population. However, despite the significant achievements of the state apparatus, there is still a problem with service delivery, which leads to dissatisfaction among citizens (Galy and Tynyshbayeva 2022).

As a result, there have been regulatory changes in the public sector aimed at providing managers with the ability to apply appropriate risk management methods. The country has also implemented a series of legal acts that regulate the use of risk management tools (Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2021).

The main area of the regulations regarding the application of risk management relates to the field of financial management. Accounting for risks and regulation in the activities of state bodies is carried out by the Central Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan in terms of asset management, banking, and investment activities. For the regulation and development of the financial market, the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan (accountable to the President) adheres to a risk-based approach within the framework of the control and supervision of subjects of the financial market, and also works to reduce the risks of carrying out activities in the insurance services market.

Further steps have been aimed at developing a base of national standards for risk management based on international standards in this area (Kazakhstan Institute of Standardization and Metrology 2024a, 2024b). The introduction of state standards has influenced the introduction of a common approach to, and set of principles of, risk management for interacting entities, and will also ensure the high-quality exchange of experience and knowledge on risk management.

Methodological conceptualization, however, has not led to success; official data on the results of the government's activities indicate poor work in terms of analyzing the current situation, risks, opportunities, global trends and conditions for further improving the welfare of the country's population (Press Office of the President of Kazakhstan 2022). The practice of public servants making managerial decisions and failing to assess the risks of changes in the external environment, internal factors and obstacles continues.

The process of assigning responsibility for risk management may not always be applied in a classical manner, as it also presents challenges within the government service system due to the involvement of multiple participants and stakeholders. Therefore, there is a pressing need to recognize the important factor of risk manager training and the essential competencies required for civil servants who manage risks and shape strategies to mitigate the negative impact of risks.

Literature review

In their extensive study, Bracci et al. (2022) noted that risk management is receiving increasing attention from scholars and practitioners in the public sector. However, difficulties in understanding and applying risk management emerge due to difficulties in systematizing and formalizing risk management knowledge. Risk management, supported by an integrated system of managerial accounting and control in public sector organizations, can help governments at all levels meet the growing needs for public service management, efficiency, and accountability (Bracci et al. 2022).

However, to this day there exist different interpretations of the term "risk," including in the field of public administration. Research conducted within government agencies in Sweden (Boholm 2019) identified over 10 approaches to defining this concept. The significance of this issue is justified by the fact that the concept of risk in public administration holds socio-political significance, because how government agencies define and prioritize risks will determine the outcomes of their dealings with them.

Risk management systems in the public sector have their own specificities in terms of implementation (Kolisovas and Škarnulis 2011). Additional research is needed to address this. In terms of organizational capabilities and mobilization for the effective deployment of an Enterprise Risk Management system in public sector organizations, this process primarily involves normative changes aimed at providing managers with the opportunity to apply relevant risk management methods (Mahama et al. 2022).

Another important aspect is the question of whether there is support from top management for these proposed initiatives. Research findings (Schäfer et al. 2022) demonstrate that the support of top management, the motivation of leaders to adopt best practices, and the stimulation of relevant policy changes (Rana et al. 2019) mediate the interaction between stakeholders and risk management practices in addressing risk management challenges in the public sector.

In this regard, the history of risk management development in the practice of public administration in Kazakhstan is relatively short; as a scientific problem, it has only begun to be addressed in recent years. The results of the analysis of Kazakhstan's regulatory framework by Omarkhanova (2022), governing risk management systems in public administration, showed a low level of development of these tools. Consequently, it should be acknowledged that there is currently a lack of both theoretical and empirical research on risk management issues in public administration in the country, taking into account contemporary trends in socio-economic and public development. Kazakhstan, like many other countries, is revising the principles and methods of public administration by transitioning from a rigid hierarchical system to an adaptive, flexible model of governance. Approaches and principles reflecting the concept of New Public Management aimed at transforming the management system through the implementation of innovative methods and tools for regulating public processes have become a priority in public administration (Lapsley 2009).

When considering the development of risk management in public administration, attention should also be paid to the assessment of the professional competencies of civil servants capable of developing and implementing a proactive approach.

The competencies of a government official are an important factor for the successful functioning of public services and are key to ensuring the effective operation of the state as a whole. A competent government official should have the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully fulfill their tasks, and should also be able to adapt to a changing environment and respond quickly to new challenges, as described in a study by Hinna et al. (2018) on implementing risk management in the Italian public sector, which discusses the hybridization between old and new practices. They should be able to effectively collaborate with team members and the public to achieve common goals. Moreover, the competencies of a government official are not limited to technical knowledge and skills; they also encompass communication, leadership, time management, conflict resolution, as well as ethical and professional standards, as concluded in a study by Gani et al. (2020) on the implementation of risk management in the Malaysian public sector to sustain the federal government's revenue. A competent government official should demonstrate a high degree of responsibility and reliability in their work.

Similar conclusions have been made by other researchers, who have also indicated that senior managers should go beyond and actively utilize risk management principles and tools in their activities. The results of interviews conducted by Tarek (2022) showed a correlation between risk perception and individual risk management strategies.

Given the importance of this issue, many researchers have examined and studied the realm of necessary competencies and knowledge for civil servants. Scholars such as Weber et al. (2013), Debela and Marijani (2023), Tikhomirov (2016), and others have contributed to the analysis of this subject. The analysis of numerous works indicates various approaches to assessing the competencies of civil servants. Despite ongoing efforts to improve the system of public administration, only one-third of civil servants in Kazakhstan receive positive evaluations from the population, who characterize the work of this minority as effective and professional (Ayubayeva et al. 2022).

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to study how the level of awareness, knowledge, and understanding of basic risk management concepts has changed among civil servants. It also aimed to assess the level of motivation, confidence, and the prospects of risk management policies within the public sector. To analyze the level of awareness, knowledge and understanding of the basic concepts of risk management among civil servants, a sociological survey was conducted among employees of central and local executive authorities. According to the official data of the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs, in terms of the personnel composition of central and local executive bodies (as of April 1, 2022), the number of Ministries is 18, and the number of positions in these bodies is 34,930, while the actual number of employees is 32,445. Local executive bodies are represented by 17 institutions, with 39,592 positions and 37,414 employees. Thus, the total number of eligible respondents was 69,859. In September 2022, a survey was conducted using the Google Forms tool, in which 771 respondents took part. The ratio of respondents from central state bodies to local executive bodies was 51.4% to 48.6%, respectively. This ratio makes it possible to ensure high-quality coverage of both civil servants responsible for the development of program documents, regulatory legal acts, and public policy in general, and those employees who implement, control, and contribute to the achievement of results and planned activities at the regional level. The key respondents in this study were middle-level civil servants and frontline employees (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the survey sample (N = 771)

Categories	Ratio (%)	Categories	Ratio (%)
Category of public authorities		**Position**	
Central government bodies	*51.4*	*Senior workers*	4.0
Local executive bodies	48.6	*Middle management*	90.7
		Lower level workers	5.3

Field of activity		Education	
Justice	*33.1*	*University PhD degree*	*1.6*
Ecology, geology and natural resources	*16.7*	*University Master's degree*	*7.0*
Finance	*7.3*	*University Bachelor's degree*	*86.8*
Healthcare	*7.0*	*Community college degree*	*4.7*
Agriculture	*4.3*		
Economy, entrepreneurship	*2.5*	**Length of government service**	
Culture and sports	*2.2*	*Up to 1 year*	*5.4*
Information and community development	*1.9*	*1 to 5 years*	*13.7*
Labor and social protection	*1.9*	*5 to 10 years*	*22.8*
Judicial system	*1.0*	*10 years and above*	*58.1*
Trade and integration	*0.8*		
Industry and infrastructure development	*0.6*		
Other	*15.9*		

The survey consisted of 5 sections: awareness of the general concepts of risk management; the practice of the application of risk management; the need to use identification and the economic and statistical analysis of risks; the automation of risk management processes; and the need for training or increasing the competence of civil servants in matters of risk management.

Results and discussion

The results of the survey of civil servants indicate that of the 771 respondents, 14.8% have no familiarity with the concept of risk management, 46.4% have heard of risk management but do not possess specific knowledge, 32.7% are familiar with the basic concepts, methods, and principles of risk management, and 4% regularly study risk management topics.
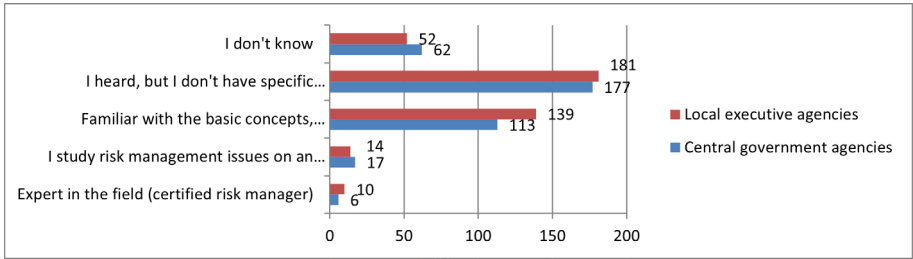
Figure 1. Awareness of the concept of risk management
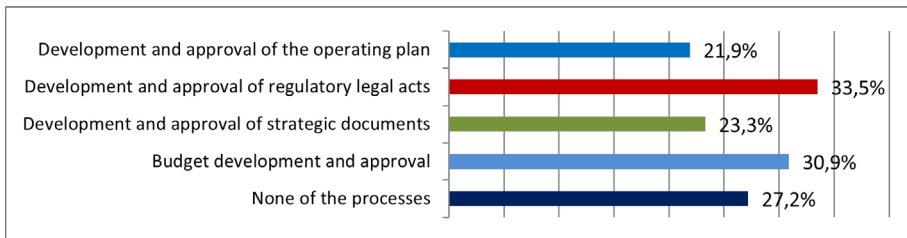
(source: authors' research results)

Additionally, only 2% are experts in the field of risk management (certified risk managers), confirming the hypothesis that the system of government service lacks qualified and competent specialists in risk management (Figure 1).

During the survey of government officials, it was found that 16.7% (Figure 2) anticipate the possibility of increased bureaucratic procedures in the event of using risk management tools such as risk identification and economic-statistical risk analysis. This indicates a low level of risk culture and a lack of organizational preparedness to utilize these tools.
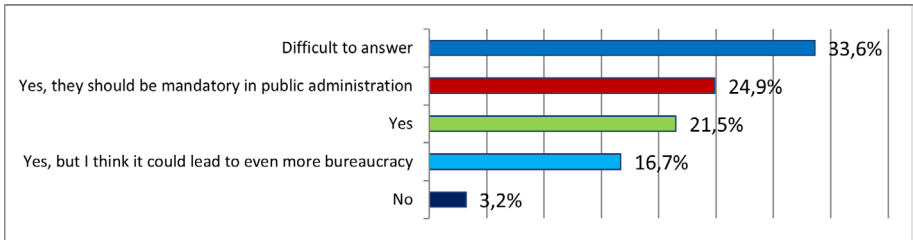
Figure 2. The need for identification and economic-statistical risk analysis
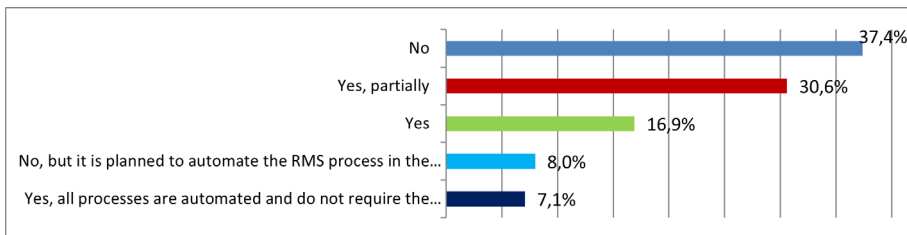
(source: authors' research results)

When making management decisions, the majority of respondents (57.8%) often take into account risks and take measures to prevent them, 13.5% sometimes do so, 13.6% only take measures at high levels of risk, 11.4% do not take into account risks, and 3.6% note risks, but do not take measures. Therefore, it can be concluded that every third managerial decision is made without fully and properly considering risks and their consequences.

Figure 3. The level of integration of risk management into business processes
(source: authors' research results)

One of the most effective methods of implementing risk management is the use of information systems. Certain departments utilize specially developed applications or software to assess the level of risk. By employing specific algorithms, considering the institution's work specifics, and analyzing data through these systems, it becomes possible to calculate risks in any area of government agency operations. The use of applications and artificial intelligence can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of specialists responsible for risk management.

During the survey, the state of automation in risk management processes in government institutions was also examined. The results revealed a low level of automation (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The degree of automation in risk management processes
(source: authors' research results)

The survey results indicate a need for training and expanding knowledge and skills in the field of risk management among public servants in Kazakhstan. Specifically, 26.2% of the respondents expressed a desire to undergo training in the short term, while 16.2% would do so in the medium term. Among the respondents, 42% answered "maybe" regarding the need for training and competence enhancement in risk management. Only 8.3% of the public servants stated that they do not wish to undergo training, while 7.3% expressed an interest in long-term training opportunities.

The implementation of new management methods and the improvement of administration in public governance require openness and readiness from the organization, including

changes in organizational culture and structure as well as the increased responsibility and mobility of employees. Among the respondents, 18.1% noted that their organizations meet these requirements and are in the process of improving their management practices. Likewise, 28.9% of the public servants believe that their government agencies have a sufficiently high level of openness and readiness. One-third of the respondents expressed the opinion that their department is partially prepared for changes and reforms in the public service system. A separate group of employees comprising 15.2% of the sample assumed that reforms in their organizations are implemented only due to instructions from higher authorities. The lowest readiness score for reforms was indicated by 5.4% of the respondents.

Thus, based on the analysis of the results of an empirical study conducted among civil servants at various levels, it can be argued that:

1. Awareness of the concept of risk management among civil servants does not meet the requirements of modern public administration. The lack of professional competencies in the field of risk management among the majority of government officials necessitates the implementation of systematic measures to prepare competent government officials.

2. In the practice of applying risk management methods, there is a low organizational culture among the participants in this process.

3. When determining the level of integration of risk management tools into the activities of the state apparatus, a high degree of implementation in the processes of development and approval of normative legal acts, budget and other strategic documents was established. However, according to the respondents, some regulatory legal acts do not always allow for proper risk assessment due to excessive regulation and duplication, which does not contribute to the improvement of the work of the state apparatus.

4. The degree of automation of risk management processes in the digital government environment requires new technologies and approaches that take into account global trends in the development of information technologies.

The basic competencies of risk managers in the public service system include the ability to identify risks and group them based on manageability and their level of impact. Public servants should properly weigh the existing external and internal risk factors and causes. When determining risk management strategy, employees should be guided by the organization's strategic goals and should not be influenced by external trends or interests. Additionally, organizational leadership should consistently motivate employees to mitigate risks and make informed decisions, taking into account the risks and their consequences.

Unfortunately, a risk management system is currently not established in the government organizations of Kazakhstan. The implementation of risk management, including the development of a risk management policy, is necessary, along with the establishment of a dedicated risk management unit or department responsible for coordinating risk management processes within the government organization.

At the same time, it is important to take into account the notion that the risk manager must have systemic knowledge, competencies and skills in the field of risk management. In particular, this includes: the skills to conduct stress testing of various types of risk; the constant control, monitoring and building of a risk management process; planning and coordinating the activities of the state body for risk management in accordance with its strategic goals, etc.

A special role is played by the constant growth of the professional and personal competencies not only of the risk manager, but also of all employees involved in the process of implementing the organization's strategic objectives through advanced training, training in specialized thematic areas, and self-study.

Regarding the formation and development of a culture of risk management in a government agency, this process involves embedding elements of risk management policy into the decision-making process. In general, the level and quality of risk management implementation can be included as one of the indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of any state body.

Conclusions

The Government of Kazakhstan faces the tasks of increasing the efficiency of state regulation, conducting quality analysis for managerial decision-making, improving the level of provision of public services, and implementing national projects to enhance their multiplicative effect. However, the effectiveness of these measures can only be achieved by considering the risks involved and implementing measures aimed at mitigating or reducing their negative impact.

In Kazakhstan, the experience of using risk management in public administration has only been applied recently, which means there are challenges regarding its effectiveness and optimality. There is a need to study international practices of implementing risk management in public governance and to gradually introduce them, considering the specifics of state strategic planning.

In this scientific article, a study of the level of development of risk management in the state bodies of Kazakhstan, the mechanics of its application, and the competencies of employees was conducted. The results of the study allow us to form the following conclusions.

1. The analysis of the regulatory framework and the practice of risk management in public institutions indicates a lack of a unified methodological framework and the impossibility of its application in all spheres of state regulation. Instead, state bodies develop legal acts based on their own understanding of risk management, which in turn reduces the effectiveness of interactions between them. As the current situation shows, there is a need to transform positive foreign experience in the development of government risk management, taking into account the sociocultural, economic,

and political processes of modern Kazakhstan. Accordingly, it is necessary to develop a regulatory legal act in Kazakhstan to determine common approaches to risk assessment and the control and order of organization of risk management units. This will optimize risk management processes.

2. A comprehensive set of measures to improve risk management in government agencies includes the preparation and training of qualified specialists. Considering that the public service system has several differences from the corporate sector, relying solely on external experts may not always be a satisfactory option. This conclusion is supported by the results of a survey conducted among current government officials in Kazakhstan. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a program for training certified risk management experts based on the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

3. The issue of the level of development of corporate culture – in particular, the openness of institutions to the introduction of innovative public administration technologies – should be considered in the context of de-bureaucratization and the formation of new principles of work for state bodies, since the lack of interaction between structural units and bureaucratic barriers does not allow the potential of risk management to be fully exploited.

Despite significant attention from scholars being directed towards identifying risks in public administration and the corresponding conditions and factors of their management, taking into account the national peculiarities of socio-cultural development in Kazakhstan, unified approaches to justifying risks in the field of public administration have not been developed to date. This highlights the relevance of our research.

At present, risk management in the system of public administration of Kazakhstan is limited to identifying risks, but there is no analysis of their impact or the planning of measures to prevent them. The government takes measures to address consequences, but does not work on addressing the root causes of these problems. For example, regarding the problem of the high rate of alcohol consumption among young people, the government has introduced age restrictions on the sale of alcoholic beverages to reduce this indicator. However, it has not taken measures to identify the causes of underage drinking and prevent this process from occurring.

A central role in public administration should be given to the system of risk evaluation, management, and reduction. The main task of risk management as an element of public administration is to make effective decisions, create necessary conditions, and plan actions, all the while taking into account risks in order to reduce their potential negative impact on planned outcomes. Thus, the application of risk management in the field of public administration allows for identifying risks, determining risk factors and sources, establishing the nature and content of threats, assessing the degree and probability of hazards, and ultimately determining the best plan of managerial actions.

In order to advance the theory and practice of risk management in public administration,

there is a need for the development of a Risk Management Concept and the regulation of competencies for risk management specialists.

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RIZIKOS VALDYMAS KAZACHSTANO VIEŠAJAME SEKTORIUJE: DABARTINĖ PADĖTIS IR PLĖTROS GALIMYBĖS

Anotacija. Rizikos valdymo sistema tiek Kazachstano, tiek daugelio kitų šalių valstybinėse institucijose tampa ypač aktuali ir moksliškai problemiška, nes nacionaliniuose projektuose ir plėtros planuose nustatytos užduotys dažnai įgyvendinamos neapibrėžtumo ir veiksnių įvairovės sąlygomis, todėl gali būti sunku tiksliai nustatyti ir kiekybiškai įvertinti riziką priimant valdymo sprendimus.

Remiantis moksliniais požiūriais į rizikos valdymą viešajame sektoriuje, šiame straipsnyje bandoma ištirti Kazachstano valstybės tarnautojų pasirengimo įgyvendinti rizikos valdymo būklę ir nustatyti darbuotojų bazinių kompetencijų spektrą bei organizacinės

kultūros lygį, nes organizacijų kultūros ir struktūros skirtumai gali turėti įtakos sėkmingam rizikos valdymo įgyvendinimui viešojo administravimo lygmeniu.

Analizuojant minėtą problemą taikytas kiekybinis mokslinio tyrimo metodas – apklausa. Ji leido padaryti išvadas ir apibendrinti didelę respondentų grupę – Kazachstano valstybės tarnautojus, apie 70 000 darbuotojų. Apklausa buvo atlikta naudojant internetinę platformą, buvo konfidencialaus pobūdžio, todėl tyrimo rezultatai pasižymi reprezentatyvumu ir patikimumu.

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